

Loop

[Voiceover] It is the injection of life that gives a city its vitality and its personality. In return, the city provides the facilities the community needs in the course of its day-to-day transactions; but it is the people themselves who are a city's most precious commodity.

As our population grows, so too must the city and its services, particularly its transport services. If Melbourne is to develop an ability to accommodate the changing patterns of progress, then it is essential that its transport system must expand to meet the needs of the people.

Each morning a race starts in which everyone is the loser. Melbourne's population increases by 150 people every day, and more than 1,000 new motor vehicles join the roads every week. Experts estimate that, by the 1980s, the peak-hour demands placed on Melbourne's public and private transport will be so great that the present system just could not handle it. This, of course, won't happen if we plan for the future. Tomorrow's quality of life depends on what we do today.

Already a transportation plan is under way that will ensure that Melbourne's population growth will be catered for; and the key to this new development towards a balanced transport system will be the Melbourne Underground Rail Loop.

The Loop is not a separate railway, but an underground extension of the existing suburban rail system. The new section will run under La Trobe and Spring Streets and join up with both the ground level and elevated tracks alongside Spencer and Flinders Streets, thereby forming a loop around the city. Everyone will benefit from the Loop because it will ease the pressure on the total transport system by enabling train travellers from the suburbs to enter and leave the city through a choice of five stations in the central business district.

At the moment, nearly 90 per cent of city rail commuters use the Flinders Street/Princes Bridge terminal; but Melbourne is fast out-growing such a concentration of commuters and already this major central terminal is overcrowded at peak hours. However, with the Loop in operation, the prospect of a bottleneck will be overcome.

The three new underground stations will be Parliament, Museum and Flagstaff. In conjunction with the existing Spencer Street Station and the Flinders Street/Princes Bridge Stations, they will ensure people and trains move quickly and smoothly in and out of the city.

Not only will the Loop system offer people the convenience of arriving closer to their work locations in the city, but the underground stations will greatly stimulate the development of new commuter facilities.

At the moment Flinders Street Station handles about 100 trains an hour during peak periods. When the Loop comes into operation, the five-station city terminal will be able to cope efficiently with twice as many trains and twice as many people.

The underground section of the Loop will consist of four tunnels, each approximately 3.7 kilometres long. The stations will be underground also and each tunnel will contain a single track designed to operate in either direction. In places, they will be as deep as 38 metres.

All suburban tracks, except the St Kilda and Port Melbourne lines, will have direct access to the loop tracks and the five stations, and a city circle track will carry people between stations within the city.

The first excavation for the Loop began in June 1971. Tunnel construction is well advanced in the rail-yards between Richmond and Flinders Street Stations, pilot tunnels have been driven beneath city streets and exploratory shafts sunk to test ground behaviour. By increasing the capacity of the city rail terminal, the Loop will enable the whole of the suburban rail system to continue to be improved.

The Melbourne Underground Rail Loop Authority supervises and coordinates the complex task of planning, financing and constructing the Loop. Current and advanced plans are discussed at regular meetings of board members and senior officers.

These buildings will make way for Flagstaff Station on the corner of William and La Trobe Streets. Entrances will be immediately opposite the Flagstaff Gardens and the historic Royal Mint.

After demolition of these two acres of property directly opposite the National Museum, work began on Museum Station. The surface area will be eventually integrated into the new forward planning for this part of the city.

Construction immediately under La Trobe Street required the traffic to be diverted along this temporary road and tramway. Drilling, and the installation of heavy steel piles, will permit the excavation of 100,000 cubic metres of rock and sandy clay. The complex structure within the excavation has been designed to support the trains, the platforms and the escalators below ground, and the reinstalled roadway along La Trobe Street.

Parliament Station will be the deepest in the system, with the lower platforms some 38 metres below ground level. Current plans provide for booking halls just below Spring Street, on either side of Bourke Street, and easy access for all passengers, whether they be travelling north, south, east or west.

At high noon, workmen descend into the new sewerage diversion tunnel in Flinders Street. At midnight, this railway bridge was moved some six metres south to make provision for trains from Jolimont to enter the Loop. Loop trains from Jolimont will pass over a new bridge, down a ramp and into this tunnel under Wellington Parade. Trains approaching the Loop from Richmond will descend through open tramps and rectangular tunnels.

This long, rectangular tunnel was built in the early stages so that restoration and improvements to the surface tracks could commence. These tunnels are formed within excavations, then covered with clay and rock before restoration of the surface tracks can take place. This 'cut and cover' method does not apply to the deeper, circular tunnels, where mining and boring techniques are used.

Trains from these three tunnels will emerge at Spencer Street before completing the loop around the city and then back into the suburban system, or to stabling sidings at off-peak times.

All suburban trains passing through North Melbourne Station will have access to the Loop. The standard-gauge flyover bridge has been extended, and work has commenced on the entrance ramp to the fourth tunnel.

The design and construction of modern, new trains; the introduction of express tracks and services; the extension of automatic signalling; higher speed limits; and new stations are all part of the overall expansion program.

Train buffs may shed a nostalgic tear for the passing of the old-style signal boxes, with their cumbersome but characteristic switching levers; but, for the day-to-day traveller, the new electronic control centres of the suburban railway system represent an essential step forward in the development of a highly-efficient commuter service geared to provide greater comfort and real savings in travel time.

By the 1980s, the number of cars on the road will be almost doubled. Parking in the city, already an irritating obligation for many drivers, will become time-consuming and totally frustrating.

Let's consider the sad tale of Alexander J. Citizen. Basically, Alexander is a most likeable fellow; but the bumper-to-bumper crawl of daily commuting has turned our mild-mannered manager into a snapping turtle. However, this is a story with a happy ending. One day our man saw the light.

It is expected that the benefits of the Loop and the expanded railway system will encourage drivers to leave their cars in the special parking areas at suburban stations, and travel to the city in tension-free, pollution-free comfort. After all, the task of a balanced transport system is to move *you*, dear fellow commuters, not vehicles.

Australian experts and leading overseas consultants are working together on the design for the construction of the Loop. On drawing boards and in the computers, specifications are continually being formulated. Progress advances towards that day in 1978 when the first trains

will run through the Loop, forming the vital link in a balanced transport system that will make Melbourne a better place for everyone in which to live, work and play.

Credits

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